

REPORT ON THE JOINT DONOR FACT-FINDING MISSION TO GALLE AND MATARA DISTRICTS

DATES: February 10-11, 2005

PARTICIPATION: USAID and the Norwegian Embassy

Recommendations

1. The districts and divisions require capacity building assistance to improve their abilities to collect and analyze humanitarian and recovery needs, as well as to better coordinate the vast relief and recovery efforts.
2. Districts need help in coordinating the offers of assistance to provide transitional and permanent shelter. Donors should support a standardized transitional shelter model that meets minimum standards (such as the UNHCR model).
3. Cash-for-work activities should be watched carefully to avoid hurting local economies, and longer-term livelihood development activities should be pursued, possibly with a focus on assisting micro-finance institutes and/or providing grants that promote job creation.
4. All activities should be cautious of creating conflict between beneficiaries and non-affected vulnerable populations.
5. Support should be provided to efforts that attempt to resolve the practicality of allowing no rebuilding in the 100-meter buffer zone, and to sensibly allocate new land in the zone beyond 100 meters.

Overview

1) The tsunami created more displacement in Galle District than in any other in Sri Lanka, according to the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies. Nearly 5,000 people died, thousands were injured and about 128 000 were affected. In total, 13,500 houses were either completely or partially damaged. Of its six divisions, Hikkaduwa Division was hardest hit with 40 percent of the district's damaged housing stock. Also in Hikkaduwa, a moving passenger train was hit by the tsunami, leaving 1,500 passengers dead. 36 camps were initially setup and about 4300 IDPs were housed in these camps. More than 100 000 choose to live either with relatives or friends. About 162 children (84 boys and 76 girls) have either lost their mother or father or both. Among them 33 have lost both parents.

In Matara District, approximately 2,000 people died and about 6000 injured and in total about 79 000 were affected. Over 7500 houses were either completely or partially damaged. 28 camps were initially setup and about 3000 displaced people were housed in those camps. About 257 children (142 boys and 115 girls) have either lost their mother or father or both. Among them 21 have lost both parents.

Findings

2) Coordination: Initially, during the first two weeks, assistance to the displaced was unorganized and inequitable; however services slowly improved. In Galle, ironically, there were more coordination meetings with government participation in the early stages of the response than now. It was told that there had not been one coordination meeting for over two weeks. Conversely, general and sector-level coordination meetings in Matara are now held regularly. For instance, there are at least two district-wide shelter coordination meetings each week in Matara.

3) In the absence of sufficient district-level direction in Galle, NGOs attempt to coordinate among themselves at the Divisional Secretariat (DS) and Grama Sevaka (GS) levels. While their meetings are helpful, they are not attended by all humanitarian responders in a given area, limiting the effectiveness of the meetings. In Galle, some NGOs negotiate their proposed interventions solely at the DS or GS level, seeking their approval, and avoiding the onerous and lengthy task of gaining district-level approval. It should be noted that working with UN, INGOs and NGOs (all non-government service providers) in a rehabilitation task is a new situation for the administration in the south, which is geared to manage government programmes.

4) A persistent problem in each district was the innumerable organizations providing assistance with or without government knowledge, coordination, and approval. In Paralliya, Galle, site of the train derailment, organizations and private citizens regularly arrive from Colombo with various offers of assistance. As a result, residents from afar—victims and others—flock here to collect material goods. At one point, there were 20-25 organizations working there. Today there is a handful.

5) Information Management: Part of Galle's problem is information management. The Galle Government Agent said his district lacked adequate hardware and trained personnel to gather and analyze data from tsunami-affected communities. He appealed for assistance to improve the speed and methods of data collection at all levels of government in the district. In Matara, the GA office relied on antiquated systems and equipment, though the tight-knit office had ready access to relevant data. Both UNICEF and UNDP maintained temporary office space in the GA building for coordination purposes. UNHCR chose not to have a presence there.

6) Key Government Relief: A major government assistance program, the ration and relief-compensation system, appears to be reaching nearly all victims. Through a public information campaign, most victims realize they qualify for 375 rupees per week for six months--200 in cash and 175 in ration cards for dry goods--plus an additional 2,500 rupees for kitchen utensils. Families who had members killed receive 15,000 rupees. Those who lost their livelihood get 5,000 per month for six months. In Galle, most have received their ration cards, but many are not yet able to cash them in, depending on the efficiency and capacity of the particular GS. On the whole, distribution seems equitable,

though some people complain they did not receive cards because they were not deemed “affected” enough by the tsunami to qualify.

7) 100-Meter Buffer Zone: By far, the issue of greatest importance and consternation is the 100-meter buffer zone ruling used in Galle and Matara that restricts families and businesses from rebuilding within 100 meters of the ocean. On February 11, residents of Hikkaduwa division in Galle planned to demonstrate against the buffer-zone restrictions. Tourism and fishing represent the vast majority of livelihoods in Galle, and both industries require a close working proximity to the ocean. Beyond 100 meters, there is clarity that rebuilding can begin, and the government is encouraging it. However, families and businesses from the 100-meter buffer zone continue to wallow in uncertainty, awaiting word from the government. In an ad-hoc method at the local level, plots of private land, sometimes belonging to temples, are being voluntarily distributed to displaced families. But, this distribution is meeting only a tiny fraction of the need. If given the chance, most families would prefer to return to their plots in the buffer zone. Some have already returned, albeit temporarily, with tents on their destroyed properties.

8) Impact on Businesses: Similarly affected are businesses, impacting thousands of livelihood, that cannot rebuild within 100 meters of the ocean, nor find adequate space to rebuild beyond 100 meters. If a business in the 100-meter buffer zone was minimally damaged and was able to continue its operations, it could re-open its doors. However, if damage curtailed its business, it would not be allowed to rebuild and re-open. And without government approval, a business cannot obtain a loan from a commercial lender. Many businesses such as those affiliated with tourism would not be commercially viable if they were relocated far from the ocean. Everyone involved appears to be awaiting a national ruling while individuals struggle to make a living.

Relief Sectors

9) Shelter: As mentioned above, there is much confusion and delay over land tenure issues for the displaced who lost property in the 100-meter buffer zone. Early after the disaster, most of the displaced in Galle and Matara lived in temporary facilities at public schools, temples, churches, and elsewhere. Today, these camps are largely vacant of overnight residents with only 3,000 living in the camps of Galle, down from the original tens of thousands. But in the daytime, the camps are still used as a location to disseminate relief supplies and relief information. Most of the displaced are now living with friends or family, or have set up tents on or near their destroyed property—either within or beyond 100 meters.

10) There is a cornucopia of tents in all different shapes and sizes displaying their donator’s flag and national identity everywhere along roads in Galle and Matara. But when asked, residents say the tents are too hot and not feasible for long-term living. Many organizations have already begun to construct transitional shelters of varying sizes and quality. Many would not meet Sphere standards. There is a dearth of organizations with apparent capacity to construct transitional shelter; the challenge will be to coordinate their construction and quality of design at the district level. For instance, Salvation Army

announced on February 12 that it would build 1,000 shelters in Galle. The Government Agent of Galle was either uninformed of these plans or did not mention that in the previous day in the discussion on shelter.

11) Water/Sanitation: Most organizations appear willing to facilitate the provision of water and sanitation in the locations where they plan to construct transitional shelters. There have been periodic coordination meetings on water/sanitation—more in Matara than Galle--and the major needs of victims appear to be met. During the period when displacement camps were teeming with people, relief organizations quickly arrived and arranged for the provision of water, mainly through tankered water and the establishment of bowsers. Today, there are still bowsers at displacement camps, though the number of displaced has greatly been reduced. Organizations are beginning to rehabilitate wells with mixed success. Nevertheless, government authorities and communities do not mention water/sanitation as a major problem.

12) Relief Items: In the immediate aftermath of the tsunami, a wave of private groups and organizations delivered relief items to affected communities, particularly those at displacement camps. Sri Lankan Red Cross and Sarvodaya were among the first to arrive with relief items, and Sarvodaya was one of the most organized in carrying out assessments and distributing relief items. At this stage, there is a dwindling amount of relief items being distributed as immediate needs have been met. Communities do not list relief items as a priority.

13) Food: The government is providing some dry-food rations and is distributing WFP-contributed food. Some NGOs are also providing food assistance. In general, communities, NGOs, and government authorities feel the current food distribution assistance is adequate.

14) Health/Protection: Emergency health needs appear to be under control and does not seem to be a major concern. Many agencies, such as Christian Childrens' Fund (CCF), are carrying out psychosocial activities, usually as after-school programs. CCF and Save the Children/UK are UNICEF's main partners in the region for psychosocial activities. The regional child protection authorities have exact numbers of children who lost both parents, as well as the number of children who lost one parent. Of these children, less than 20 were taken to government childrens' homes. Through UNICEF, each orphaned child receives 500 rupees per month. The child protection authorities sent a psychologist to hospitals immediately after the disaster to counsel affected youth.

15) Livelihoods: In addition to shelter, livelihoods appear to be one of the highest priorities with tens of thousands out of work indefinitely. Many NGOs are carrying out cash-for-work (CFW) projects, temporarily employing victims to do debris cleanups and small-scale rehabilitation projects. In some cases, such as in Matara, CFW is used to engage victims in creative livelihood projects such as boat repair and block-making enterprises. In some parts of Sri Lanka, CFW has started to interfere with the rice harvest, a labor intensive endeavor, and has caused the minimum daily wage for CFW workers and rice harvesters to escalate. The norm had been 300 rupees per day for unskilled workers, and 500 for skilled. In some places, the rate has gone as high as 400

or more. In Galle and Matara, the rates appear to be fairly steady at a rough average of 350 per day without a threat of escalation or harm to the local markets.

16) Micro-Finance: Micro-finance institutes (MFI) operating in Galle and Matara, including larger ones such as SEEDS and Arthacharya Foundation, are unable to make new loans to ongoing clients because of stressed liquidity as a result of rescheduling and writing off loans of affected clients. These MFIs serve thousands of small-scale entrepreneurs, fishermen, and others in the two districts. The local branches of the MFIs are awaiting instructions from their Colombo offices, unsure of how to proceed under such tenuous circumstances.

Visits

18) From February 10-11, the joint donor fact-finding mission met with:

- INGOs: GOAL, CHF, Caritas/CRS, Christian Children's Fund
- NGOs: Sarvodaya, Sri Lankan Red Cross Society
- Government: Government Agent-Galle, Additional Government Agent-Matara, Shelter Coordinator, Matara, Provincial Commissioner of Child Care Services, Housing Director, Galle, Division Secretariat for Balapitiya (Galle District.)
- Micro-Finance Institutes: SEEDS (Matara), Arthacharya (Galle)
- UN representatives from: UNDP, UNHCR, UNICEF
- Numerous affected individuals.